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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that both the place of research in graduate education and the conception of research inculcated in students have changed and that research among graduate students has become a "luxurious necessity." The paper considers: (1) the traditional role of research in doctoral education; (2) the changing nature of student finances and support; (3) the changing support for research; and (4) the changing need for research experience and publications as a job requirement. It is argued that the elements of recent experience of graduate students come together to make research activity extremely important for entrance and advancement in careers, while at the same time making research more costly and difficult for the student. The temptation may be strong under these conditions to do research as quickly and inexpensively as possible, with the greatest number of rewards as are feasible. Expensive research topics requiring costly and lengthy efforts may be avoided, especially if the topic is unfashionable. It is suggested that research needs to be done on the understanding of research that graduate students have, on faculty views of research, and on the role of research in graduate education. Contains 19 references. (GLR)

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The Changing Atmosphere for Research Among Graduate Students

Leonard L. Baird

Presented at AERA, San Francisco, 1992

Research is an integral part of graduate training, even in professionally oriented fields. Ideally, research, as a part of the socialization process in graduate education, plays a large role in the development of competent and knowledgeable academic professionals. However, a variety of forces have changed both the place of research in graduate education and the conception of research inculcated in students. In short, I will argue in this paper that research among graduate students has become a luxurious necessity.

The Traditional Role of Research in Doctoral Education

The doctorate traditionally has been considered as primarily a research degree, and candidates for doctoral work usually must produce a dissertation based on original research, although its creativity or contribution varies. It is often considered a requirement with an educational intent. As the Council of Graduate Schools stated in The Role and Nature of the Doctoral Dissertation (1991):

> The dissertation is the beginning of one's scholarly work, not its culmination. Dissertation research should provide students with hands-on, directed experience in the primary research methods of the discipline, and should prepare students for the type of research/scholarship that will be expected of them after they receive the PhD degree.

The emphasis on research is reflected in coursework requirements, which typically require students to take courses in current research questions in their discipline, as well as courses in general research methods and special research methods considered unique to each field. At my own institution, for example, virtually every program which awards the doctorate, no matter how "pragmatic" the field, offers and requires courses in research methods and research topics in the field.

In addition to representing a requirement for the degree, the period of dissertation writing is also seen as an occasion to enter the community of the discipline. As analyzed by Berkenkotter, Huckin and Ackerman (1991), a large part of this process involves learning the forms of discourse that defines the community:

> "1. Members of a research community share a "model of knowing." This model of knowing is embedded in the research methodology that incoming students in graduate programs learn, and is encoded in the language that community members use.

2. A research community extends beyond a student's graduate school to include researchers at other institutions. The vanguard of these researchers constitutes an "invisible college" wherein they share their work with one another through publications in professional journals and through papers delivered at professional meetings.

3. Papers and publications are among a research community's communicative forums; significant issues are raised, defined, and debated within these forums. In this sense, to publish and to be cited is to enter the community's discourse.

4. Graduate students are initiated into the research community through the reading and writing they do, through instruction in research methodology, and through interaction with faculty and with their peers. A major part of this initiation process is learning how to use appropriate written linguistic conventions for communicating through disciplinary forums." (p. 193)

These processes of entering the community involve acquiring genre knowledge and joining the conversation among researchers in the field. For example, Swales and Najjar (1987) have analyzed the ways in which research articles are written based on the anticipated reactions of peer-colleagues. Students learn to make these anticipations though interactions with faculty as well as by following the models for articles that are available in the literature. Thus, students learn to speak, write and think like the members of their discipline, as represented initially by their professors and later by other members in the discipline encountered directly in meetings, colloquia, and indirectly through journal articles, books, etc. The incorporation of these forms of thinking and discourse into the dissertation and other research efforts plays a vital part in the general process of socialization to the professional role, as described by Baird (1990).

However, this idealized version of the process of socialization to research in the discipline is challenged on several fronts making it rarer, as outlined below.

The Changing Context: Student Finances and Support

The difficulties students face in financing their graduate careers have increased over the last decade. As federal policy has shifted away from direct grants and fellowships to loans, students increasingly have had to look to their own resources, either current resources from their own and their spouse's jobs outside the university, or the future resources that will be required to pay off loans. The National Research Council (1989) reported that of all doctoral recipients in all fields in 1989, 48 percent relied primarily on personal resources (including spouse's earnings); 35 percent relied primarily on university funding; 12 percent relied

on federal sources; and 5 percent depended on other sources. Among those with university support, the percentages of those who depended on teaching assistantships rose fairly steadily during the 1980's (Bowen and Rudenstine, 1992). Those with research assistantships, as poignantly described by Hackett (1990) increasingly are pressed into narrow job duties that may not add to their educations or help them produce a dissertation or research of their own. Altogether these trends lead to the situation described by the Council of Graduate Schools (1991):

> Barriers to timely completion of the dissertation are myriad, but the one most frequently cited by faculty, students, and graduate administrators alike is lack of adequate financial support during the dissertation phase of the doctoral program, a problem that is especially vexing to students in the humanities and the social sciences.

The Changing Context: Support for Research

Not only has the federal share of academic research declined, (National Science Board, 1991) but its character has changed (Hackett, 1990). Not only is there greater competition for funds, but the calls for projects are more often spelled out in great detail, and the emphasis on efficiency leads to smaller amounts of discretionary support, shorter time frames and greater numbers of progress reports, etc. Combined with a greater concern with research that bears on policy issues of interest to the government, this trend means that there has been a shift toward directed and reactive research and away from free and proactive research (Hackett, 1990). The increasing presence of industrial and commercial sponsorship of research likewise has led to constrained and very goal specific research, with little room for the kinds of intellectual exploration that is important to faculty and graduate students alike (Blumenthal, et al, 1986). The long term consequences of these trends for graduate students are described by Hackett (1990, p. 260).

> Tight research budgets with little discretionary money and sharp competitive pressures (with high productivity standards for remaining supported) compel faculty to take a more instrumental view of their subordinates, viewing them more as research labor than as students. This may, in turn, impede the students' education and development of independent careers by forcing them into the more specialized work formerly performed by technicians and by reducing the time and resources available to them for independent investigation under the umbrella of their professors' grants.

The upshot of all this is that graduate students often have to rely on their own resources to carry out the intellectual and practical work needed to complete the dissertation research that would begin their research careers. Although creating problems in all fields, the difficulties may be especially great in fields such

as history, anthropology, musicology, area studies and others emphasizing qualitative methods, where intensive field work or archival work is essential. This work is time consuming, usually requires travel, and often involves many false starts. It is also seldom supported by grants or fellowships. In most fields, then, there are financial pressures which may lead graduate students to look for research projects that are doable, attainable, and completable in a fairly short time and with minimal expense (Weil, 1990).

The Changing Context: Faculty Researchers as Examples

The American research university has become a very complex enterprise involving large amounts of money and entailing an elaborate infrastructure (Geiger, 1986, Lowen, 1991). The very size and complexity of this effort has led universities to treat professors and their offices or laboratories as "cost centers" which are expected to obtain support for the costs of doing research as well as the salaries of their staffs, including graduate students. In many departments the message is conveyed to graduate students fairly early in their careers that obtaining external support is integral to academic research. Thus, in some departments there may be as much or more emphasis on getting funded as on doing the research in the best way.

One of the consequences of these pressures on faculty is that they have less time to give to graduate students, as described by Hackett (1990) and Sternberg.

> " . . . The candidate should write his dissertation with the bottom-line assumption that nobody is going to help him. Within that general guideline, recent successful candidates are better sources for advice and counsel than the graduate faculty . . ."

In addition, graduate students can observe what their professors do in their research, which may, according to Hackett (1990), include avoiding innovative or "risky" topics (too unlikely to get funded), using "quick and dirty" research methods (they cost less), and fractionating the results so they can appear in as many articles or papers as possible (more bang for the buck). In short, research may be presented to graduate students in very careerist terms.

The Changing Job Requirements: The Need for Research Experience and Publications

Entrance to academe has traditionally required evidence of research skills and publications (Burke, 1988; Youn and Zelterman, 1988), so it is little surprise that graduate students oriented toward academic careers would wish to have such evidence on their applications. However, there is at least anecdotal evidence that entrance to nonacademic jobs also frequently requires a record of such research skills. Popular job seeking guides such as What Color is Your Parachute? and the increase in books on grantsmanship

and intrapeneuring also suggest the importance of the ability to prepare research and grant proposals as well as write up the results of projects. Thus graduate students see the need for grant getting and research skills to further their careers whether they are employed within or without the university. And, indeed, when recent doctoral recipients have been surveyed they report that their research activities during graduate school affected their careers, and wished they had had more research publications and presentations during graduate school (Busk, Jensen, and Prince, 1991). Further, students are commonly advised to establish research and publication records as soon as possible (Frierson, 1990). Thus students perceive the need for research activity in graduate school, and, in fact, seem to engage in such activities. For example, recent data from the University of Illinois, Chicago indicates that about half of the graduate students in the advance stages of their doctoral work had authored or co-authored papers presented at professional meetings, authored or coauthored an article submitted to a journal, authored or coauthored an article accepted by a journal, and written or cowritten a proposal for a research project (Baird, 1992). Graduating students at Ohio State report an average of one publication, and in certain fields, the average is three to four (Issac, 1990). Thus, graduate students seem to have heard and heeded the call for research and publications. It would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that research is seen as a necessity for entrance to a good career. The career implications of research are clearly described by Wilbur (1988).

> "There is a great deal that can be done as a graduate student to increase your chances of obtaining a satisfactory position in academia. A number of scholarly publications before the dissertation is submitted is becoming the norm, at least in the sciences. Attendance at meetings of scholarly societies and the presentations of talks or posters is not only good practice but good advertisement. A high level of intellectual interaction with fellow students and faculty throughout your graduate studies produces favorable letters of reference and propels you to the top of your advisor's list of "promising young scholars." Begin this behavior as soon as possible after entering graduate school. Too many students begin their publishing careers by pushing a series of potboilers off to journals six months before they intend to apply for positions. Today's competition demands that you prepare for an academic position as soon as you enter graduate school."

The Luxurious Necessity

All the elements of the recent situation of graduate students come together to make research activity extremely important for entrance and advancement in careers, while at the same time making research more costly and difficult for the student. Thus, many graduate students may see research as a commodity needed for

pragmatic purposes. An ideal commodity can be obtained cheaply, but sold at a high price. Thus the temptation may be strong to do research as quickly and inexpensively as possible, with the greatest number of rewards as are feasible(e.g. presentations, publications). Research topics which require lengthy or costly efforts may be avoided, especially if the topic is currently unfashionable. Although the notion that altruistic, disinterested research was the norm in the past is probably romantic fiction, that fiction was widely expressed and believed. The current situation, in which research is considered in terms much like that of any other business, may be more realistic, but it may have long term consequences that include poorer research, the proliferation of small publications over larger work, and an avoidance of the risky and the creative (Hackett, 1990). We may be preparing our graduate students for the "real world" as currently defined, but we may be doing them, and ourselves, a disservice over the long haul.

Implications for Research

Although the trends just described present a reasonably coherent picture, it is admitably more speculative than definitive. One area in which much more research needs to be done is the understanding that graduate students have of research in professional development and in their careers. The various influences on this understanding also need to be analyzed by positions (e.g., research assistantships, employment in industry, etc.), professors' activities (research conducted, consulting, etc.) and discipline, among others. Similar investigations into faculty views of research and its role in graduate education need to be done. Given the enormous influence that research activity has in the life of universities' graduate education and the future of knowledge, these investigations could help us deal with major issues that affect our lives in academe.

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